



Latino Voices are Here to Stay

Senior Project

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Abstract

In 2021, Hispanic/ Latino students made up 9% of undergraduate enrollment at UNC Pembroke. This is a growth from 2020, standing at 8.5%. In 2021, more than 21% of students at UNC Pembroke reported they were first generation (UNC Pembroke 2021). First generation Latino students are on the rise at UNC Pembroke, due to the embracement of diversity. Through this embracement, the university and faculty foster a voice within students. This voice speaks through perseverance and creating generational advancements, specifically in Latino students. Through this paper, factors that contribute to Latino students' voices will be discussed, how Latino students' voices have attempted to be silenced, and how cultivating a voice for Latinos at an institution such as UNC Pembroke is essential. At the end, a found poem will be presented with first generation Latino students' attitude towards education, UNC Pembroke, and a voice that has been gained from pertaining to this institution.

Latino Voices are Here to Stay

Introduction

First-generation Latino college students are on the rise worldwide across collegiate level institutions. Rising from one point five million in 2000 to a new high of three point eight million in 2019 – partly reflecting the group’s rapid growth as a share of the overall U.S. population. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of Latinos enrolled at four-year institutions jumped from six hundred twenty thousand to two point four million, a two hundred eighty seven percent increase. By comparison, overall student enrollment at four-year institutions in the U.S. grew by fifty percent during this time (Mora 2022). Specifically at UNC Pembroke, in 2021, Hispanic/Latino students made up nine percent of undergraduate enrollment at UNC Pembroke. This is a growth from 2020, standing at eight-point five percent. In 2021, more than twenty one percent of students at UNC Pembroke reported they were first-generation (UNC Pembroke 2021). This contributes to the notion that first-generation Latino students are on the rise. There are many factors that contribute as to why specifically first-generation Latino students are enrolling in collegiate level institutions at a rapid growing pace.

First-generation Latino students credit their desire and drive to want to continue their education at the collegiate level post-high school has been attributed to their parents’ desire for them to have a respectable job, their desire for them to have a degree that results in a sustainable job, and their desire for a career that will result in a stable career and life in the work field. More than three-quarters (seventy seven percent) of Latinos aged sixteen to twenty-five say their parents and the

reasons listed above are the motives they decided to pursue a higher education (Lopez 2009). It is important to analyze why Latino parents think this way and why they feel so strongly about imposing their beliefs upon their children.

Additionally, it is important to analyze what is implied when it is said first-generation Latino students have a voice and how it can be furthered through their college education. Understanding what this voice is, how it is found, used, and often amongst Latinos attempted to be silenced, is necessary in understanding why it is important to discuss that Latino voices are here to stay. The media, politicians, policies, free speech turning into hate speech, and America itself has contributed towards the isolation and silencing of Latinos. This has greater ramifications when considering first-generation Latino students and their pertaining to an institution.

Lastly, it is important to view why UNC Pembroke is attracting substantial amounts of first-generation Latino students. UNC Pembroke has qualities that set itself apart from other institutions and identifying what they are is vital. Through identifying the university's most attractive and strongest qualities, it can be drawn upon why students are choosing to integrate themselves in this institution.

Alongside, it is to be noted that where a first-generation Latino student chooses to imbed themselves is how their voice and self will be developed. When placed and embedded in an institution that believes in you as a person, validates you as a person, and acknowledges your value as a person, the result can be life changing for the student and impact the institution positively.

Through focusing on various first-generation Latino students' life experiences, academic experiences, and experience at UNC Pembroke, a found poem

is presented. This is to show the value and voice gained or enhanced through belonging to the institution. Every first-generation Latino student has a different story, here it is aimed to unite us all in one fashion where we can all feel seen, heard, and valued.

Contributing Factors

Like many people, one's parents' advice, parental encouragement, and a sort of pressure is the main driving reason why students enroll in collegiate level education. However, for first-generation Latinos, this is experienced on a much wider and impactful scale. This is due to compared to their white, African American, Native American, etc. counterparts, first-generation Latinos often come from parents who immigrated to this country. There are various forms of immigrating into the United States. Often, most immigrants have the traumatic experience of crossing over by foot for weeks on end through the desert, by crossing bodies of water, or through other tumultuous ways. Following this, immigrants who cross illegally do not have access to a social security number, driver's license, or any governmental help. Thus, immigrants find work in low paying factory jobs, working in harsh weather conditions in fields, and other essential jobs with undesirable pay or conditions. In all, eighty four percent of undocumented immigrant workers held such jobs in 2017, including those in the service sector (2.3 million workers) and construction sector (1.3 million workers). By comparison, sixty two percent of U.S. workers held these types of jobs (Krogstad et al. 2020).

For all these reasons, first-generation Latinos' parents place an emphasis on their children to pursue a collegiate level education. They believe that through

obtaining an education and a degree from an institution, their children will be better off in their future. This can be linked to their lack of access to an education and other resources upon their arrival to the United States. Their belief is that their children will not have to work the harsh jobs they do, earn the low wages they do, or suffer in general the way they do from not having access to resources. Moral support for education is the foundation—perhaps the essence—of how Latino immigrant parents participate in their children’s schooling (Auerbach 2006).

Moral support includes practices such as stressing the value of education and hard work. This will encourage first-generation Latino students to study, do well, and go to college. Beliefs and practices surrounding moral support for education are deeply rooted in traditional Latino cultural beliefs. The degree to which Latino immigrant parents embrace traditional schemas depends on their life history, such as number of years in the United States and degree of exposure to mainstream American beliefs like their parent involvement norm as previously discussed. Often, it is seen how parents believe their role is to provide a strong moral foundation. If they do not provide this, school and learning are seen as impossible or irrelevant. Latino immigrant parents often culturally believe a child who is well-educated is a good person with correct behavior and a respectful manner (Auerbach 2006). This is someone who follows the right path in life, including doing well in school. School is oftentimes described to first-generation Latino students as their only job, thus encouraging and ingraining in them that all they must do is perform well in school. With this schema, it is not surprising that

many immigrant parents see their role primarily as educational motivators and encouragers.

It is noticeably clear to see that for first-generation Latino students, their families and parental figures had the biggest influence on their decision to pursue a collegiate level education. Additionally, parental figures feel so deeply about their children's need for a proper education because of their lack of access to one and hardships faced in the United States once they immigrated. Research regarding parents' moral support towards their children findings revealed that family members (i.e., parents, siblings, aunts/ uncles, cousins, and grandparents) played an instrumental role in passing along positive messages about education and college. For parents in particular, these messages were often a direct reflection of the messages they themselves received as children (e.g., the importance of formal education and the morals/values they learned in the home). Parents held high aspirations for students to be someone in life and shared their own education and migration stories to the United States to motivate children to pursue their education (Zavala 2020).

The Voice

When speaking of the voice first-generation Latino students have, how it is cultivated at an institution, and how it is often attempted to be silenced, it is important to understand what it meant by this voice. The voice that everyone holds is powerful, however, an emphasis is placed on that of first-generation Latino college students' voices. Their voice implies having power over the presentation of reality and meaning, and the ability to construct, articulate, and therefore shape one's

experience as it is presented to others. What is meant by experiences is that such as their unique experience of having immigrant parents, the struggles their immigrant parents face, and therefore the emphasis on education their immigrant parents place upon education. Like everyone else, Latinos exhibit multiple voices (e.g., the public voice versus the private voice, the voice used with friends versus with teachers in school). However, we are cautioned to remember that voice is not synonymous with empowerment nor is language synonymous with voice. Rather, language is merely the tool through which voice is expressed. For voice to be empowering, it must be heard, not simply spoken (Quiroz 2001).

Once first-generation Latinos discover their voice and the power it holds, it presents them with many opportunities. Specifically, first-generation Latino students have the advantage of social mobility for issues that matter to them and pertain to them. Being educated, having a degree, and knowing firsthand what it is like to have immigrant parents or be an immigrant oneself, allows for activism and advocating. Activism and advocating for immigrant rights, advocating thoughts on negative/positive immigrant policies, advocating through voting, and promoting voting for immigrant friendly policies, and simply being able to openly advocate in general is powerful.

Many immigrants find themselves scared to advocate for their rights or desire to see change due to fear of the American government resulting in deportation. Increased fears are affecting families' daily routines, particularly those who are undocumented. They are only leaving the house when necessary, such as for work, limiting driving, and no longer participating in recreational activities, like

visiting their local park (Artiga and Ubri 2017). Thus, first-generation Latino students being able to advocate on immigrants' behalf is powerful and demonstrates that they are here and still being represented one way or another. First-generation Latino students are using their voice in powerful and impactful ways not only in their communities but on America as a whole. Often, individuals may feel threatened by this voice. When one feels threatened, they feel the need to tear others down to stay in a position of dominance over them and what they are speaking out against or advocating for.

Hate Speech on the Voice

When individuals feel as though their popular opinion and their power is being undermined or challenged, the result is often hate speech towards the person going against them. In this instance, it would be projecting hate speech towards an individual advocating for immigrant rights in whatever form it may be. Within the last ten years, there has been an increase in open hate speech towards Latinos rooted in different justifications. Hate speech towards Latinos in the U.S. can encourage violence towards Latinos and instill negative ideas towards Latinos in the general American population (Jessurun & Smith 2016). Specifically, in the United States, one of the driving factors that allows for hate speech to be protected in a sense is through the first amendment.

The first amendment of the constitution of the United States explains that Congress make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. It protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for redress of grievances (The White House 2022). This allows

people to often make hateful and harmful comments on whatever it may be, often criticizing Latinos. During his campaign, former President Trump stated “when Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Phillips 2021 quoting Trump 2017). Not only was this statement not statistically and academically correct, but it also caused copious amounts of American citizens to have negative feelings towards Latinos.

This statement helped gain former President Trump a following, and this following of people came together because they collectively did not like Mexicans and were under the impression that they were in the country illegally, bringing drugs, crime, and were rapists. Due to the spread of misinformation, Latinos in America were made a target of hatred and harassment. Two-thirds (sixty seven percent) of Latinos stated Trump administration policies have been harmful to Latinos. Nearly four-in-ten Latinos say they have experienced at least one of four offensive incidents in the past year because of their Latino background such as experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment because of their Latino background, being criticized for speaking Spanish in public, being told to go back to their home country, or being called offensive names (Barrera et.al 2018).

Thus, through the fears Latinos were experiencing from various forms of open hate towards them, they found their voices being silenced. Latinos find themselves silenced by the popular opinion and no longer feel confident speaking

out against issues that matter to them or need representation. This in turn affects the social mobility their voice allows them to have. By being afraid of becoming a target of someone's hate in whatever form it may be, Latinos cannot as openly advocate. Advocating for issues that matter to them and on behalf of the immigrant Latinos in the community that are already afraid to speak out, results in no real change being seen at various levels socially and politically. This is troubling because if the target of hate is afraid to speak out because of the very hate, it results in no one advocating for change and things stay as they are. When first-generation Latino students lose their voice and are afraid of speaking out or speaking for issues that matter to them at their institution, the institution loses a vital component that many search for.

Cultivating a Voice at UNC Pembroke

Something that is unbelievably valuable to the first-generation Latino student is where they decide to pursue their collegiate level education at. This is meaningful because they are the first in their family to begin a legacy at this institution that other family members behind them can fall into as well. It often establishes the family name for the first-generation student and therefore allows for professional connections to be made and scholarships to be earned or offered. Among those who attended college, adults with a parent who has a bachelor's degree or more education are more likely than those without a college-educated parent to have attended a "more selective" school (fifty-one percent vs twenty-three percent, respectively). By contrast, those who don't have a parent with a four-year college degree are much more likely to have attended a less selective college – fifty-

four percent vs twenty-four percent of those with a college-educated parent (Fry 2021).

UNC Pembroke is an institution that is incredibly special because it holds something that many first-generation Latinos seek. Diversity at UNC Pembroke is very prevalent and easy to spot. UNC Pembroke community reflects diverse ethnicities, backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. U.S. News and World Report recognized UNC Pembroke as among the most ethnically diverse university's in the South. The minority enrollment at UNC Pembroke is sixty-one percent (UNC Pembroke 2022). UNC Pembroke being a rich and diverse campus with students coming from divergent backgrounds allows for first-generation Latino students to feel at ease. As a minority themselves, they find themselves easing into the college experience better knowing they are not alone statistically. When you are at an institution such as UNC Pembroke that holds diversity as one of its main and most desirable attributes, it attracts an array of students coming from all walks of life.

When you embed yourself in an institution such as UNC Pembroke, you are surrounded by professors, faculty, and students alike that all hold diversity as a point of utmost importance. Professors at UNC Pembroke allow diverse conversations to happen in their classrooms and allow for conversations to be held regarding social injustices or issues that matter to students. Professors allow students to have a voice in classrooms. For first-generation Latino students at UNC Pembroke, this is what is important and vital when selecting an institution to pertain to as a first-generation college student. When interviewing a pool of four first-generation Latino students that attend UNC Pembroke, astoundingly all

identified diversity as the number one driving force behind why they choose to attend UNC Pembroke. All stated they knew the diversity would allow for a better college experience. UNC Pembroke allows for the space of first-generation Latino voices to prosper and grow throughout their educational journey. Through UNC Pembroke and all it does to foster the voice within first-generation Latino students, it is evident Latino voices are here to stay.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after analyzing factors that contribute to Latino students' voices, how Latino students' voices have attempted to be silenced, and how cultivating a voice for Latinos at an institution such as UNC Pembroke is vital, one can determine Latino voices are here to stay and are a vital component of UNC Pembroke and society. I interviewed four first-generation Latino students that attend UNC Pembroke and asked them a variety of questions regarding their attitude towards education, UNC Pembroke, and a voice that has been gained from pertaining to this institution. I have compiled all their responses into a found poem. A found poem is an original poem that is created from short lines or phrases by other writers or speakers, possibly incorporating some original language by the person creating the found poem to add to the poem's meaning and flow (Haladay 2022).

Found Poem

A doctor, lawyer, or nurse,
Something of importance they said
So you do not suffer like we did,
They said
For a better life
That my parents sacrificed so much for
Factory jobs, low wages, discrimination
They endured all this for
Me
My parents have sacrificed their lives for me
For my education at UNC Pembroke
For my voice at UNC Pembroke
For this voice politicians, people, America
Has tried to
Silence
Immigrant, freeloader, wetback
For I have heard it all
I was taught to persevere through life
To make the most of what I am given
UNC Pembroke has given me a voice
This voice advocates
Education is
A powerful tool that cannot be taken from me
Education means
Countless opportunities that present itself
Taking advantage of those opportunities
For a better life
UNC Pembroke has supported this voice
This voice is here to
Stay

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